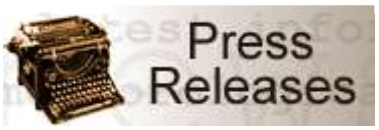

The Meteorological Office

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SCORCHING START TO 1998

The first six months of 1998 have been easily the warmest first half of a year globally since reliable records began in 1860. Provisional observations analysed jointly by The Met. Office and the University of East Anglia show that the temperature averaged over January - June 1998 has been some 0.6oC greater than the average climate (calculated from the period 1961-1990). Each individual month in 1998 so far has been the warmest such month on record. Furthermore, the twelve month period July 1997 to June 1998 (with an anomaly of 0.56oC) has been very much warmer than any other 12 month period not influenced by the current El Niño.

Although El Niño, the natural periodic warming of the tropical Pacific Ocean, has been a major contributor to the current warmth, it is not the only cause; the global-average temperature around the time of the large El Niño in 1877/78 was some 0.5oC below today's global average temperature. The cause of the underlying warming over the course of this century is not fully understood, but there is increasing evidence that human activities, through the release of carbon dioxide from burning fossil fuels, play a part.

The warmest full year on record was 1997, with an anomaly of 0.43oC. David Parker, Head of Climate Monitoring at The Met. Office's Hadley Centre for Climate Prediction and Research, says: "The prospect of 1998 being warmer than 1997 is very high; the margin depends on the rate at which the warm El Niño is replaced with cool sea temperatures in the same region - La Nina". Dr Phil Jones of the University of East Anglia's Climatic Research Unit comments: "It already seems likely that 1998 will indeed be warmer than 1997. Measurements 100-200m below the surface in the tropical Pacific show a large pool of cold water which is already beginning to surface. Like El Niño, La Nina can also influence weather patterns world-wide, although its effect on Europe is believed to be generally small."

ENDS

For further information:

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